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Paris-Amsterdam Underground

Essays on Cultural Resistance, Subversion, and Diversion

Edited by Christoph Lindner and Andrew Hussey

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5. Detours, Delays, Derailments: *La Petite Jérusalem* and Slow Training in Culture

Sudeep Dasgupta

Culture as travel

In his essay 'Travelling Cultures', James Clifford emphasized the mobility of cultures in opposition to the anthropological tendency to localize and fix its location. Critiquing the tendency in ethnography to 'privilege relations of dwelling over relations of travel' (99), Clifford rightly problematizes oversimplified localizations of culture, yet his casting of culture as travel risks moving too fast in the opposite direction. The essay opens with a quote from C.L.R. James: 'it's not … where you are or what you have, but where you come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there' (qtd. in Clifford 96) that matters. Maybe, but the construction of oppositions ('not') betrays a desire for movement whose urgency and speed will often be deflected and delayed precisely by the location ('where you are') and what determines and undermines the speed at which one gets somewhere. Travel, mobility, the fleeting, and the liminal: these have by now become the modes through which culture is understood. That is, a consensual formation has developed that figures culture through the metaphor of travel and mobility as a broadly left and progressive response to the violently exclusionary and right-wing solidifications of cultural discourse as fixity, traditions, roots, and belonging. Routes rather than roots, that is. The airport lounge, the hotel and motel, the ship: these have become some of the sites through which the dimension of speed and the experience of transiency further an 'anthropology of supermodernity' and the valorization of 'non-places' (Augé).

The aim of this essay is not to refuse the important interventions these arguments conducted. I do not aim to revalorize the local, the fixed, and the traditional and pose these concepts as a truer account of contemporary cultural formations. Rather, the purpose of my argument is to slow down the speed by which we arrived at conclusions of culture as travel, in an attempt to pause and reflect on the journey itself, and the locations implied in the notion of a journey. Traditions, as authors from Walter Benjamin and Stuart Hall to Edward Said and Eric Hobsbawm have reminded us, are anything but stable. Precisely for this reason, the opposition between movement and connotations of modernity, destinations and the future, cannot be opposed to dwelling and tradition, fixity, and uniformity.

My reading of the film *La Petite Jérusalem* (Karin Albou, 2005) aims at inducing a pause in the speed by which we understand culture as travel, and attend

to the temporality of culture as lived and embodied within a complex nexus which articulates the past, present, and future across multiple spatial trajectories, above and below ground. This does not mean that travel does not figure in the argument. It does, in the form of the metro (Réseau Express Régional or RER) which connects Paris to its suburban environs, and that the protagonist, Laura, travels on between Sarcelles, 'Little Jerusalem', and Paris. But the film, rather than staging culture as encounter between two points on the metro, also stays, pauses, and dwells on other spaces, experiences, and encounters, which are linked to the underground though not exclusively captured by it. Speed, transiency, fleetingness are crossed with detours and delays which prolong the arrival at a destination and slow down the rate at which intellectual desire seeks to cast 'culture as travel'.

This crossing, or junction between speed and slowness, travel and fixity, is indebted to a more dialectical understanding of the problematic of culture. Instability, fleetingness, transiency (what Clifford calls a 'postmodern' and 'postcolonial' phenomenon) might become problematic precisely because in their own way, these discourses of culture produce a paradox signalled by Fredric Jameson. In *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson argues:

> One may very well welcome the current slogans of anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism [discourses on cultural identity have been predominant here] without ignoring the obvious, namely that these pre-eminently theoretical slogans and programs have already themselves become thematized and reified – in other words, have themselves begun to turn into foundationalisms and philosophical systems in their own right. (10)

My argument seeks to explicitly acknowledge this paradox of foundational anti-foundationalism and focus on what gets lost in the rush to thematize speed and travel.

The argument seeks to reframe the figuration of culture between the binaries of fixity and movement, stasis and travel, tradition and modernity, by pausing, dwelling, and reflecting on what happens at both ends of the journey, and in the journey itself. This inclusion of delays, detours, and possible derailments does not reinstall locality, fixity, and tradition, but factors into the discourse of culture as travel the already living complexity of culture as belonging *along the points* through which the metro figures culture as travel. Contradictions encountered on the way from one point to another slow down, deflect, and rearrange the trajectories which mark culture as travel. Acknowledging and holding these contradictions together, and maintaining their tense signifying and experiential dimensions furthers a dialectical understanding of traveling cultures without rushing toward a narrative denouement whose destination is knowable in advance.

Delays, detours, and destinations have spatial and temporal dimensions. The coordination, or rather the problematic alignment of space and time, is inseparable from what Peter Osborne calls 'the politics of time'. A political understanding of temporality, and its attendant manifestations in experiences of travel as markers of modernity, underwrite this essay's emphasis on delays, detours, and the ar-

ticulation of temporality to spatiality. Teleological time in particular has acquired a negative valence, as the narrative articulation of progression through space and time toward a goal. But, as Mary Ann Doane has argued, the contingency of time is also a necessary condition for the political reordering of modernity. In other words, the contingency of time is precisely what lends it to manipulation in the context of modernity. Travel can be spatially mapped as the temporal movement of bodies whose contingency is crucial to the experience of modernity. Doane argues that temporal contingency, which in my argument is exemplified in detours and delays, is crucial for the political management of time and space. Delays and detours, as experiences of contingency, undermine the teleological movement through space toward a destination.

If contingency undermines arrival at a destination, then the discourse of culture *as* travel needs to acknowledge the thickened, embodied, culturally complex experiences of contingency – detours and delays – within modernity. The underground emblematizes both cultural complexity and contingency. In many western metropoles, the underground is not just a channel or space for the transportation of bodies. It is also the spatial ordering of class, race, and other social hierarchies, as Mike Davis argues in his 'excavation' of the city of Los Angeles in *City of Quartz*. The predominantly white city center of Amsterdam, too, manifests surface racial and class homogeneity while underground, in that it serves as a hub for transporting classed and ethnically distinct commuters back and forth to urban concentrations in the suburbs. Paris possesses a similar spatial dynamic: the *banlieues*, while not predominantly 'colored' or composed of immigrant communities, are themselves segregated. Accidental encounters, delays, and detours as contingent temporal experiences take place within the space of the underground. The surface-depth, center-periphery spatial axes of the cities also harbor potentialities for temporal contingency signalled by Davis's counterintuitive phrase 'excavating the future'.

The narrativization of these contingent temporalities poses a problem. While rightly arguing that contingency is a *necessary* dimension of time crucial for politically-motivated organization, Doane constructs a dichotomy between contingency and narration: 'Contingency introduces the element of life and the concrete ... Description is a capitulation to the vast and uncontrollable, and ultimately meaningless realm of the contingent' (12). She goes on to argue: 'Narration, on the other hand, has an intimate relation with the past (it "recounts") and is therefore able to testify to necessity and inevitability' (12). In the encounters and experiences which take place on both ends of the metro line, and on it, however, the delays and detours which interrupt a teleological narrative are contingent precisely because they articulate the past to the present.

The 'element of life and the concrete' visualized in *La Petite Jérusalem* is far from being meaningless and acquires a specific resonance in the narrativization of travel as culture, by constructing a specific nexus of past-present-future. While the suburb, the metro, and the movement of peoples are indeed markers of modernity, contingent encounters, temporal delays, and spatial detours connect and give meaning to the disparate histories and geographies of the protagonists. This resonance produces meanings which, while related to the past, do not testify to

either the necessity or inevitability that teleological narration presupposes. The time of modernity in the space of travel is both contingent and meaningful. The uncontrollable realm of the contingent and the narration of past histories intersect, and the time of this intersection is the time of delays and detours.

Detours as Delays

While the metro repeatedly emerges as the site of Laura's travel, notions of encounter, travel, and mobility are not the meanings attached to the metro. The film opens with a location, Sarcelles, which is produced through an overhead establishing shot, very similar to the panoptic, traditional ethnographer's gaze which disturbs Clifford in his critique of ethnography. The location is further specified through a particular ritual, linked to a form of Judaism. In a sense, then, the opening of the film suggests exactly the opposite of travel and transiency. At this end of the metro, the film seems to fix a location, and ascribe cultural tradition to a space producing a homogeneity shared by a community marked by religious belief. This establishing shot could be seen as also establishing a discourse on culture in two ways. Firstly, this is a unified homogenous culture on one end of the metro, at the other end of which is another culture which, when encountered, will set the cultural situatedness of the protagonist Laura into motion. This would be the figuration of culture as travel, and this opening shot, the first location on the railway line of travelling culture. Alternatively, this figuration of culture could be seen precisely as the opposite of culture as travel, as the production of an image of a closed-off, 'other' community in the tradition of the anthropology of Boas or Malinowski.

The speed with which Clifford's critique of location – and his valorization of travel – moves is striking. While he acknowledges that there are numerous internal differences *within a location* he feels obliged to rush through and emphasize travel as the mode through which culture needs to be understood. The film, on the other hand, pauses and fleshes out the lived complexity of the location, at one end of the metro, prior to the experience of travel. A location is of course not an abstract space, but a lived material space marked by conflictual relationality. In this case, it is the relations between the members of Laura's family that the film starts outlining, rather than some speed-induced dizzying destabilization of her culture triggered by the metro. Laura's family consists of her elder sister and husband, and her mother who moved to France from Tunisia. The family's location is spread out across the unstable signifiers of 'France', 'Tunisia', and 'Jewish'. While the relations between the two daughters is close, the marriage between the husband and his wife (Laura's sister) is fraught with problems. Throughout the film he plays the patriarchal role of a man governing a household of women and maintaining their cultural 'heritage', though it also emerges that he is involved in a sexual liaison with another woman. This 'impure' element, as it were, in a seemingly pure and homogenous cultural unit, makes 'Little Jerusalem' not exactly live up to its designation as the location for a certain kind of orthodox Judaism. The husband's adultery opens a gap between marriage as social institution

and religion as basis of cultural fixity. His wife, instead of broaching his adultery with him, seeks the counsel of an elderly woman who seems to be the leader of a community of Jewish women in Sarcelles. There she is told that if her husband is adulterous it is her responsibility to repair the damage by making herself sexually attractive to him, and responsive to his sexual needs.

Gender and sexual politics, and their interruption of a figuration of community as a unified and homogenous whole, interrupt any temptation to figure the starting point of the metro (Sarcelles) as a static point in a trajectory of culture as travel. Travel (within the diegesis) does not seem to initiate a complex and diversified understanding of culture. Difference, change, conflict, and shifting power relations accrue within one space *prior* to any considerations of travel, speed, or transiency. It is as if before the train has started to take culture on a voyage into speed, complexity, and hybridity, it is already problematized at the point of embarkation, in Sarcelles. Clifford suggests that instead of location in terms of dwelling and home, travel and speed need to be emphasized. He suggests the hotel as a chronotope of culture precisely because it emphasizes temporality, encounters, conflict, and transiency. Approvingly quoting Meaghan Morris here, he cites this argument of hers: 'Motels, unlike hotels, demolish sense regimes of place, locale and history. They memorialize only movement, speed, and perpetual circulation' (qtd. in Clifford 106). By pausing to dwell on the place of the home, on family, gender and sexual relations, and religious belonging, the film does not fall within the binarism Morris relies on between maintaining or demolishing, preserving or destroying. Rather, the figuration of Laura's family, at the origin point of the RER's trajectory between Sarcelles and Paris, complicates and internally diversifies the 'sense regimes of home, locale and history'. Further, it does not memorialize speed and perpetual circulation but thickens up and exposes the sedimented and unequal relations of power which structure cultural identity *before* the question of travel comes up.

Further, the unequal power relations that accrue within the home are themselves traces of prior movements: Jewishness here is explicitly linked to diasporic movements (Tunisia). The starting point then is also the destination point, depending on what time scale frames the spatial trajectory of the family. Or rather, the home is both the point of embarkation and the point of arrival. The origin is also the trace. The complex temporality of the term 'origin' is pithily described by Walter Benjamin:

> Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. (*Origin* 45)

Sarcelles is not the beginning point of a journey, and of the film, but figured at the start as also the bearer of a process begun long before, in the experience of diaspora and that of 'disappearing' from a certain place, Tunisia. Genesis and genealogy are not defining of movement however. The play between appearing

and disappearing, being in the present and becoming in the future refract the spatio-temporal dimensions of culture as travel.

While the underground trajectory of a train journey suggests a beginning and an end point, the cultural experience of travel figures a railway line as also so many points of transit in the multiple trajectories of movement. The complex temporality of the origin also implies a visual and spatial dimension. A moment is not just a temporal point, but revealed from the perspective from which it is perceived within space. The perceptual orientation from which a point on a journey is grasped reveals a specific aspect of the term 'origin'. The origin is the starting point of a process of becoming, but when perceived as an aspect of the experiential dimensions of the body, casts the latter also as the bearer (*Träger*) of multiple histories. This double-meaning is neatly captured in Edward Said's autobiography *Out of Place*. A temporal orientation ('place') is also a subjective, psychic, and spatial disorientation (being 'out of place'). The lived complexity of an internally-fractured cultural identity and the spatio-temporal complexity of the physical space of the home are linked. Such an understanding complicates the meaning of the end-starting point of the metro: it is both the starting and end point, *and* also the combination of both with a transitory stop in a journey which moves in *many directions*, as we shall see.

Destination as Detour

The film does go on to figure travel through the space of the metro that Laura takes to the university in Paris. By now bringing in another space, and the metro as a link between the place of home and the place of the world outside, the University in Paris, the film suggests a staging precisely of culture as travel. One could be tempted to start seeing the function of the metro, and the place of the University, as elements in a further destabilizing of the locale of home. This becomes even more apparent when we see Laura attending a lecture on Immanuel Kant. The two opposite elements, or spaces, with the metro as the medium of encounter and transfer *seem* to emerge – Laura in the space of family, tradition, and religion in Sarcelles, 'Little Jerusalem', and Laura in the classroom in Paris encountering not tradition, but critical reason in the writings of Kant and therefore the fruits of rationality rather than religion.

However, such an opposition between the two end points of Laura's travel is undermined by the film. The origin, as we have seen, is also the bearer of prior travels and the marker of a transition point. No unified, homogenous culture (whether Jewish, suburban, religious) can be located at the origin. The meaning of the encounter with Kant in the Parisian classroom at the other end of the railway line is thus not one side of a binary between tradition and modernity. Kant's casting of the Enlightenment as a critical deployment of Reason, exemplified in the interrogation of tradition, has already begun around the sexual politics of conjugal fidelity within a specific Jewish orthodox tradition on the other end of the train line.

The film undoes a simple opposition between the two end points of Laura's

journey. The destination is not an opposition, but involves a relay between the two locations. Such a figuration of their interrelationship, while complicating the meaning of destination, also partakes of a further intensification of the meaning of travel – in particular, travel as detour. The notion of detour implies movement but also deflection. The point of origin (Sarcelles), as we have seen, is itself a transition point between past (Tunisia) and future (an elsewhere not yet determined). Before we can begin a consideration of the destination in the future, Sarcelles, and the space *between* it and Paris, detours, that is, deflects, a theoretical desire to cast culture as travel while precisely deploying the metro as a motif. For in Sarcelles, and in the train between Paris and Sarcelles, Laura encounters Djamel. Djamel, an Algerian, lives and works, in Sarcelles and as the film progresses we realize that he is a colleague of Laura's, both part of the cleaning staff of a school. Cultural encounter and mobility do not emerge (yet) in the space of Paris. Rather, it is the encounter with Djamel in Sarcelles that intensifies the figuration of cultural complexity, just as the sexual politics of her sister's marriage does. Paris as destination then, is actually a detour in the narrative emplotment of the film, in the sense that if one is tempted to see Paris and Sarcelles as the two spaces the metro links, the film turns back to Sarcelles – but not a Sarcelles as locale of the fixity of Jewish tradition, a 'Little Jerusalem', but as the location where relations between Djamel and Laura get established and their consequences start getting explored, slowly.

'Detour' here describes the intellectual waylaying of the discursive temptation to characterize culture as travel and mobility, and not just a detour in the focus of the film. The detour produces a pause, a staying in place, yet this staying in place has a temporality that summons up the recent and distant past and articulates it to the complexity of the present. One of the strengths of the film lies precisely in the centralizing of the metro or underground which becomes the mode to paradoxically figure the importance of locale rather than travel, slowness and detours rather than speed and destinations. The sequences of Laura traveling on the metro are distributed throughout the film, often accompanied by dialogic silence yet accompanied by the rumble of the wheels echoing in the tunnels of the RER. At one point, the train stops in the middle of a tunnel, the lights go out and as they flicker back on, a close-up reveals her fingers clasped around the hand of another on the same handrail. The image, and the time of its taking, visualize the focus of my argument. In the stillness of the train, paused between destinations, two hands meet, one white (Laura) and the other darker. The time of delay is the point of meeting. The image in the underground visualizes on a broader spatial level the encounter above ground between Laura and Djamel, moving the space of the encounter into the time of waiting, before arriving at a destination.

An encounter above ground produces the complex temporality and an articulation of the underground with the suburb. While Djamel and Laura are working together cleaning the halls of the school one evening she is called to an emergency. She and Djamel rush to a football field where her brother-in-law, and some other people, identifiably Jewish by the yarmulkes they wear as they are being attacked. The scene is clearly an anti-Semitic attack. As Djamel rushes to help, he suddenly pauses and walks away quickly as the police arrive, in the middle of

the violent attack. The meaning of that swerving away from the scene is not immediately explained. It suggests to the viewer (and Laura) possible conclusions. Does Djamel turn away because his liaison with Laura is a secret and her family would encounter them together here and notice something? Or, does Djamel turn away because the people on the football field are Jewish? No immediate explanation of his sudden withdrawal from the scene is forthcoming. Later, in a conversation between Laura and Djamel the reason is revealed. Djamel is an 'illegal' (*sans papier*). The arrival of the police to protect the (Jewish) players being attacked signifies at the same time the threat of discovery for Djamel, and possible deportation. The incident brings Laura and Djamel together to another space, while separating them at the same time, a separation which has less to do with 'culture', whether Jewish or 'Muslim', than with legal status and social security. By showing and not immediately telling, the incident exemplifies the process of producing scenes and retracting meaning, a forward and backward movement in visualization and signification, anticipation and explanation. The film seems to stage certain paradigmatic scenes of cultural exchange, encounter and mobility, and then detours our desire to rush to a conclusion by bringing up unexpected reasons for what we see. It provokes frozen mobility, and functions as the visual analogue of the temporality of philosophical engagement with culture as travel by figuring 'the irregular rhythm of the constant pause, the sudden change of direction' (Benjamin, *Origin* 197). The insertion of Djamel's legal status rather than his ethnic or religious identity diverts us from ascribing the encounter to that of cultural specificity and conflict and inserts the question of the state into the scene, fixing him into a state of suspended mobility.

Sarcelles as the site of delay which detours the arrival in Paris as destination is a place, a locale, but one which makes visible in the play between showing and (not) telling other spatial and temporal trajectories marked by diasporic settlement on the one hand and transient contingency on the other. Place does not imply fixity but the spatial location of intersections of different temporal trajectories of past, present, and possible futures.

Some Terminal Points

The origin or point of departure of a journey is the space where the time of the past gathers. The origin emerges as a point of transition rather than a beginning. The journey toward Paris gets delayed by returning the viewer to the transition/origin point to gather together more temporalities borne by the bodies of Djamel and Laura. The film as literal transporter through time for the viewer gathers speed and moves toward its ending, yet what it figures is not one, but multiple terminal points, moving in different directions and producing different meanings of the term 'travel'. Djamel and Laura's secret affair unravels. Dependent on the silence of his extended family that is sheltering him from discovery by the police, Djamel must accede to their demands to end his liaison with Laura, though typically, his explanation of the break-up is couched in cultural terms. Her female agency in resisting her own family's displeasure is countered by his lack of agency in the face of familial and state power.

The consequences of the events (conjugal infidelity, anti-Semitism, the uncovered affair across cultures) induce the patriarch in the family, Laura's brother-in-law, to decide to move them to Israel. When he announces his decision (there is no discussion) at the dinner table, his mother-in-law, Laura's mother, stands up and walks away in silence. The meaning of her exit from the room is not explained. The family scene, its staging and fissuring, visualizes the politics of mobility. The differentiated gender, class, and religious experiences of travel, the motivations for choosing destinations and the meaning of movement coalesce around this patriarchal decision. The historical predicament of diasporic settlement produces specific conundrums when embedded in hostile environments. The term 'hostile' is itself politically loaded, particularly for the family in 'Little Jerusalem'. Does the family as a single unit experience hostility? How does traditional patriarchal power authorize itself as the motor for movement? If the dinner table scene stages family, continuity, genealogy and tradition, the mother's exit from the scene suggests a distancing from her son-in-law's decision. The silent comment becomes voluble when Laura expresses her desire not to move with the family to Israel. Her refusal breaks the link between genealogy, race (based on blood) and place, or rather return to a place. Patriarchal authority and genealogical continuity demand travel, yet here it is not 'culture as travel', but travel as stasis, continuity and fixity that is being invoked by the 'father figure'. While the underground, through the RER, has been the only mode of travel figured in the film, toward the end it is the airplane that emerges as the absent presence. Both modes of travel, under the ground and up in the air, take on specific meanings. These meanings introduce an ambivalence in the meaning of travel (and settlement).

Travel, forced or voluntary, produces exile, yet the responses to exile (*galut*) in the Jewish case are anything but unproblematic. While the underground represents movement to Paris, the capital of a country whose staunch republicanism emphasizes national universalism rather than ethnic particularity, the flight to Israel *combines* the two, equalizing racial/genealogical continuity with national belonging. In their critique of Zionism, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin articulate exile, that is, settlement outside Israel, as the specific Jewish experience of diaspora. For them, Zionism is 'the subversion of Jewish culture and not its culmination' (712), the return to Israel cast as the 'capturing of Judaism by the state' (713). Paradoxically then, in the time frame of the present, diaspora means settlement, and culture as fixity of location defines Jewish culture, though from a longer historical perspective travel marks the 'origins' of the Jewish diaspora. Jonathan Boyarin goes on to argue:

> We Jews should recognize the strength that comes from a diversity of communal arrangements and concentrations both among Jews and with *our* several others. We should recognize that the copresence of those others is not a threat, but rather the condition of our lives. (129, emphasis added)

The discourse of cultural fluidity and mobility is predicated on the positing of divisions such as tradition and modernity, fixity and travel, essentialism and non-essentialism. The conclusion or destination of such a discourse is the grasping

of culture's non-fixity and the privileging of travel. Keeping in mind Boyarin's argument, the conclusion, or destination of the film's argument, reverses and complicates this discourse. The underground links multiple others that inhabit the same space, both at either side of the train line and through the space in between. Laura's refusal to move is an avowal of a desire to move, yet the movement she aspires to is predicated on the possibilities opened up by the 'copresence' of others. Strikingly, Boyarin writes '*our* several others'. The 'other' implies alterity but by conjoining alterity with 'our' he undermines a division between self and other while acknowledging the difference. Further, where hostility is the frame through which the male head of the family understands 'copresence', for Laura this copresence is not a threat but the condition of her life. Sarcelles, and her decision to stay (and move to Paris, as we shall see) is a consequence of her casting hostility into the non-threatening possibility of cohabitation with *her* others. Culture is both travel and fixity, genealogy and history, the complexity of location (Sarcelles) and the simplicity of dislocation (return to Israel). 'Jewishness', the Boyarins argue, 'disrupts the very category of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with each other' (721).

The dialectics of mobility explicitly rejects a teleology of narrative completion (return to Israel and end of exile). It thinks the 'not only' and the 'and' together. It transforms the one into two, rather than the two becoming one, as Guy Debord put it, in his deployment of dialectics as the methodological instrument of permanent political critique (35). To think travel and fixity together is to think cultural identity through *both* rather than through the transformation of one into the other at a higher, later stage. This thinking of the two, dialectically, is a process of permanent transformation, of the unexpected swerve from the path, of a detour that leads elsewhere which is always a *some*where. The delays and detours are a consequence of holding together and maintaining tensions ('our others') rather than fleeing from contradictions. The underground links contradictions rather than transcending them and 'these contradictions must be held together' (Boyarin and Boyarin 721) – this is what a dialectics of delay and detour means.

The closing episode of the film links destination with dissemination, the endpoint of the narrative combining destination as arrival with multiple departures. The spectator has followed the narrative to its end, but where we arrive, at the end, is a bifurcated journey about to begin. This birfurcation articulates time and space, history and geography, counter-intuitively. Laura's decision to stay in France is supported by her mother, who gives Laura her wedding ring to help finance her move to Paris. The ring is linked to a past, in Tunisia, and a marriage of which Laura is an offspring. The past enables a future journey rather than a return back, and the bearer of that past, Laura's mother, facilitates it. Routes rather than roots, where genealogy generates spatial movement rather than blood ties. The family splits, moving in opposite directions, yet one side of the family facilitates the other's move in an opposite direction. For the family, travel is not the mode for the unfixing of culture's essentialist ideology but becomes the mode through which notions of the origin, the promised land, closed identity, and purity emerge. France, when seen as the location of Laura's life, takes on

precisely the opposite meaning, travel from Sarcelles to Paris furthering a future of encounters with multiple others. The location of France where the film is set becomes precisely the location for cultural mobility, while travel to Israel becomes the way in which the family establishes cultural fixity. The metro and the airplane cross places, one enabling an airborne return to the source and the other a subterranean journey into the future.

Only at the very end of the film does the metro come to signify the space through which a break from fixity into a future of mobility and encounter gets figured. If one compares this to a discourse of traveling cultures, the beginning of this discourse, setting off on travel, emerges in the film right at the end instead. The length of the film is thus a preparation for a voyage rather than the staging of culture as travel. Spending time fleshing out the complexity of cultural encounters and internal differences on one end of the metro line, the film suggests the need precisely for pausing, reflecting, and acknowledging that speed, travel, and mobility are inseparable from detours, delays and the ambiguities of destinations.